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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
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SUBJECT: Syria/Iraq, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Peace
Conference (8/22)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on August 22 reported President Asad's meeting on August 21 with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in which he reiterated Syria's support for the current political process in Iraq and stressed the need to intensify efforts to create a suitable foundation for achieving national reconciliation among Iraqi parties in order to guarantee Iraq's unity and independence and consolidate its Arab and Islamic identity. President Asad condemned the terrorist attacks targeting Iraqi people, institutions and places of worship. Al-Maliki and the accompanying delegation expressed relief over President Asad's positions regarding Iraq and his commitment to its security and stability. Talks during the meeting focused on bilateral relations and means of strengthening them in the interest of both peoples. Talks also dealt with current security cooperation between the two countries and the need to bolster it, in addition to economic relations and the importance of achieving economic integration between Iraq and Syria. Later, VP Shara continued discussions with Prime Minister Al-Maliki in a separate meeting.

In a statement to reporters following the meetings, Al-Maliki described the atmosphere of talks as positive, saying "the two countries seek to establish bilateral relations on all levels." "Talks concentrated on the economic domain in order to provide opportunities of cooperation in this field," Iraqi Premier added, noting "Iraq needs Syrian efforts and Syrian companies to contribute to the reconstruction process in all fields." "The Security file in Iraq is considered the golden key to the developments and positive points we are searching for, so this file was one of the main issues during dialogues and we found Syrian understanding in this regard," Al-Maliki stressed. He denied conveying a message from anyone to Syria, saying "I convey the message of Iraq; I convey files for understanding; I believe that Iraq's neighboring countries are concerned with controlling security and stability; we found understanding and support for the political process and national reconciliation."

As for agreements between both states, Al-Maliki expressed interest in reviving former agreements and putting them into effect. On Iraqi refugees in Syria, the Iraqi Prime Minister said this issue is human and needs cooperation with Syria to tackle this issue and support those refugees during this ordeal as well as providing them

with stability and preparing for their return to their homeland after a secure condition is stable there.

Syrian commentators reiterated the importance of Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Maliki's visit to Syria and stressed that the solution to Iraq's problem lies in the withdrawal of the American forces from Iraq and the achievement of political reconciliation in the country.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad discusses with Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Maliki the importance of boosting security cooperation and achieving economic integration.

President Asad reiterates to Al-Maliki Syria's support of the current political process and national reconciliation in Iraq. President Asad condemns the terrorist attacks targeting Iraqi people, institutions and places of worship" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/22)

"Al-Maliki: We had positive and good talks. We need Syrian companies to contribute to the reconstruction process in all fields" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/22)

"Syria and Iraq conclude agreements in the oil field. Formulas reached on security cooperation. Al-Maliki denied Washington's claims: I carried a message from Iraq; I did not carry another message" (Independent al-Watan, 8/22)

"Syria and Iraq agree to rehabilitate a crude petroleum transport pipeline between Iraqi city of Kirkuk and Syrian coastal city of Banyas" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/22)

"In the light of heavy criticism caused by his visit to Baghdad, Kouchner: Paris' policy on Iraq is independent from Washington's" (Independent al-Watan, 8/22)

"Israel continues its terrorist escalation against the Gaza Strip. Five Palestinians martyred in Gaza; one martyred in Nablus" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/22)

"A Week before his appearance before Congress to assess a new strategy for Iraq, US Ambassador Ryan Crocker: Our progress in Iraq is disappointing" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/22)

"A split in Washington over amending the 49th article of the Lebanese Constitution. Lahoud heads towards forming a six-fold salvation government headed by the army commander" (Independent al-Watan, 8/22)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"With Fraternal Iraq"

Omar Jaftali, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/22): "Damascus welcomed the Iraqi Prime Minister hoping his visit will mark a new and serious stage in the relations between the two sisterly countries in all fields and help resolve all the pending issues....

"The US occupation is the reason behind the tragedy of Iraq and all Iraqis, not the neighboring countries, as the occupation claims....

"Syria, which is greatly grieved by the security deterioration in Iraq, has extended its hand to Iraqi brothers, removed all the excuses that the American occupation gave, resumed the diplomatic relations with Iraq, signed many economic cooperation agreements with Iraq and worked to activate them to serve the two countries and peoples, hosted about 2 million displaced Iraqis and has given them special treatment....

"Now that Al-Maliki's visit has boosted relations and cooperation between Syria and Iraq, the visit also provides an opportunity for

the Iraqi Prime Minister to learn the Syrian viewpoint and Syria's cooperation with every measure that would end the suffering and the tragedy of Iraqis at home and abroad....

"There is no doubt that the Iraqi brothers' endeavor to schedule withdrawal of occupation forces, up to the full removal of this occupation, and to achieve a political reconciliation, which is indispensable to strengthen the Iraqi people's ability to confront hard circumstances, constitutes the strong foundation for a unified Iraq of the future within its Arab family.

"Syria will not hesitate to help Iraqi brothers fulfill their aspirations and to effectively contribute to the easing of their suffering so that Iraq can return to the Arab fold united and recovered from all the harm caused by occupation."

"The Starting Point"

Ali Qasim, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/22): "In Damascus, Al-Maliki found and sensed facts that many have long tried to suppress, and in some cases to distort and twist. He saw firsthand the huge efforts that Syria is making to help Iraqis come out of their crisis, and he clearly heard the ideas and proposals, and even the bases, that can form the genuine framework for any solution in Iraq....

"Syria from the very beginning announced its position against the occupation of Iraq and clearly determined the difficult challenges

the region would face as a result of the occupation.

"In this visit, necessity dictates that the Iraqi Prime Minister rearrange the equation in light of the Syrian reading of the Iraqi situation, especially when this reading offers the true formulas that ensure Iraq's unity and stability and help the country preserve its independence and existence....

"The Iraqi Prime Minister, who is facing all kinds of challenges, and who is coming under immense pressure from the occupation's administration, realizes this fact, especially when the occupation tries to blame Iraqis and other countries in the region for its crisis and failure.... In this climate, the visit appears important for Syrian-Iraqi relations, and its results will reflect positively on the region....

"The Middle East, which is experiencing the most dangerous situation in its history, remains, with its countries and peoples, the more able to fulfill the ambitions of its peoples and determine the best ways for its relations. The starting point is the end of the occupation, from which the region is suffering."

"What Al-Maliki Will Hear in Damascus?"

Ibrahim Darraji, a commentator in independent al-Watan, wrote (8/22): "Recently there were some incidents on the Syrian-Iraqi border in which Americans, who supervise the border on the Iraqi side, deliberately spread chaos and created crises for Syrians and then publicly accused Syria of non-cooperation to control the border holding Syria responsible for the failure of all US policies and plans in Iraq....

"We hope that Syrian officials will explain to Al-Maliki the lack of cooperation from the other side of the border, which is controlled by Americans, and the security and humanitarian problems this lack of cooperation creates for Syria, which has the right to complain about the failure to cooperate with it to control the border....

"We hope Al-Maliki will be told about all the efforts that Syria is making to control the border, including cooperation with the international organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration, to bring in experts and equipment to identify the

points of weakness and strengthen the ability to discover forged documents. This is in addition to the security efforts, which led to our border forces coming under more than 100 attacks from inside Iraq and resulting in the martyrdom of six of our soldiers and the wounding of 17 others. This is what Syria is doing. What did the others offer other than further intentional chaos and plenty of accusations and lies, which appear to have become the main characteristic of the policies of many countries these days?"

"Britain... Pullout Is Courage"

Sa'id Musallam, a commentator in government-owned al-Thawra, wrote (8/22): "British military leaders recently confirmed the importance of withdrawing British forces from Iraq because there is nothing for them to achieve there...."

"The possible British withdrawal disturbs the US Administration's hawks. This is why the United States asked Sarkozy, its new ally, to send his foreign minister to Baghdad. The aim is to show that the allies are increasing or at least to make up for the withdrawal of a main party from the field. But they are under a big illusion. Until the British forces are ordered to leave, the tsar of the White House will remain busy arranging the loyalty of his last allies: Laura and his dog. And even this is doubtful!"

"Without Previous Preparation"

Haydar Haydar, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/22): "President Bush's call for a peace meeting in Washington in December shows the amount of maneuvering in the persistent efforts that are being made to arrange the situation in the region based on American and Israeli interests and without taking into consideration the interests of the peoples of the region and their aspirations for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace based on UN resolutions...."

"The call for the meeting was made without consulting with anyone and without preparation in advance.... This is a booby-trapped call to devour Arab rights...."

Corbin